

TWO CITIES: BETWEEN REPRESENTATIONS AND PRODUCED IMAGES

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ABSTRACT

There is a tendency within literature and scientists thoughts related to urban researches that says there is no crisis of the reality of the city, but there is a crisis of the representation of this reality. Could the image of a city cancel the city itself? Despite the fact that it is hard to figure out something while it is still taking form; this paper explains, to some extent, the close tie between the image of a city and its representation. The two cities we speak about are Constantine city and the new town of Ali Mendjelli. They are in opposition, a bit paradoxical, as well in the remarks that represent the inhabitants' feelings as in the specialists' thoughts: "the ancient city and the new city".

A frequent mobility from one city to another constitutes an actual parameter associated to a field of possibilities which makes it likely to socially institute an individual capacity of selection and comparison, even evaluation, and social criticism. To understand inhabitants reaction as well as his mode of adaptation, while his mobility between the two different environments, as sense producing urban entities, we will give insights in points that are relevant to the identity of a city, with a focus on the impact of a rapid urbanization beside an age-old one on citizen mental images.

Keywords: Age-old city, Rapid urbanization, Built landscape features, Mental representations, Identity, Visual culture, Space appropriation.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is true that the concept of "city" is a fuzzy one, a very broad term, difficult to define. In spite of this fact, the most general and concrete definition is that one which identifies the city as "a mode of space appropriation by a human group of certain importance"; the place giving the feeling of belonging to it. Therefore, the stress is on mental inhabitants representations in connection with the lived city. The representation of this materiality in its absence that is connected with the significances for each one, lived, collective and individual experiment, and closely related to the urban experiment and the urban culture which results from it.

A broadly known fact is that there is a great variety of mental representations of a city. The ones of the urban residents, the representations of artists as a form of sublimation, representations of the urban planners and the policies translating the desired city, finally those of the researchers who want to rebuild the city logically. However, the significant connection that establishes between a human being and the place where he lives consists of the act of identification, in other words the recognition of belonging to this place. The appropriation of the place is carried out at the same time as the self-definition in this same place by the act of identification.

N.Schulz calls this "existential spatiality" (Schulz Ch N, 1988); thing which does not require at all the orientation's functions, so of organization and of fitting in the city, because one can find his bearing among the built forms organized in a space, without being completely identified with them.

The particular character of a place is the indispensable condition of the interiorization and the highlighting of a space as being a representation of the identity, and this particular character is closely related to the values in connection with the semantic system managing the architectural forms in a place, in fact, the city.

2. CONSTANTINE CITY



Figure1: Constantine overhead photo

The town of Constantine is the third most important town located at the North East of Algeria. It has always been and remains represented, imagined and described through its picturesque and particular site and landscape. Through this external sight of the city, the inhabitants imagine it and represent it in its absence; with more consistency, for them, it exists in relation and by this sight from the others on it. Grafted to the site, there is the inherited built patrimony that makes the figure of this city inseparable from its history specificities and its development process. The landscape sight of the city seems to constitute, since always, the principal means to

make the city a high place. And no one can be unaware of the characteristic of this Turkish Arab city, mainly metamorphosed by the Haussmann gesture, of which it reflects images of modernity at the end of the 19th century, architecture intended to enrich the city visual culture by monuments charged to educate the sight.



Figure2 : Plan of Constantine localisation
Source : <http://www.djazair2003.org/decouvrir.php?rub=1&page=1>

The Medina of Constantine is a testimony of diverse civilisations: numide, Greco-roman, arabo-islamic Turkish and French. It is an age-old city, which site has been occupied since very long time. That is why Constantine is perceived as a huge monument regarding to its urban and architectural appearance. A population around 538 000 inhabitants occupies "Le Rocher", the rock supporting the centre of Constantine.



Figure3 : Bridges in Constantine-photoAdhamKirdani

Constantine is a strong city because of its characteristics and its very marked and specific figure from both its site and history. This typical natural and urban environment worked, since more than one century, the aesthetic conscience of the majority of its inhabitants, so much so that in their opinion it is the CITY, where they lived and which they know since always. Constantine is one of the cities having marked more the social history and representations. The famous "Rock" of Constantine is the fundamental space of representation as a historical centre remaining for always the real centre town; that towards which the Constantine's inhabitants always go for a stroll, do their shopping... even when they live at the new city of Ali Mendjelli.

The problematic medina has been a huge question to deal with, that appears several times in diverse ways of thinking about. Nevertheless, the only action that has been undertaken is the project of rehabilitation that did not emerge from patrimonial concern, but rather in logic of enhancement and embellishment of the general appearance. Since less than three years ago, the local Authorities target Constantine for some actions planned within a whole program of "urban renewing". The main aim is to raise the city to a metropolitan rate; taking the necessary steps and using the tools for a sustainable development thought process. For this sort of strategy, the immediate step was the enhancement of urban image of Constantine, especially the structuring axis and main thoroughfares; beside that, tackling the issue of the traffic system.

On the other hand, from 1962 until now, Constantine city experienced a rapid growth in population and in demand, especially for housing and services. This imposed new infrastructure demands, particularly for dwellings, jobs, services and transportation systems. The authorities planned a new city to fulfill several goals at once: providing larger spaces for housing and else. The fact is that the new city is facing a great rejection from both the inhabitants and Constantine citizen. There is no more expressive of this impression than the sentence of Marc Cote: *"Which type of kid has grown in the shade of the old city?"*. The author who brings back the inhabitants of Constantine opinion on this urban fact: *"the inhabitants of Constantine find all the arguments to condemn this creation, "which does not have anything of a new city". They condemn the municipal officials, the promoters, the inhabitants, the architects, the practices"* (Cote M.2006).

3-THE NEW TOWN OF ALI MENDJELLI



Figure 3: some views inside Ali Mendjelli city

In year 2000, whereas hardly this new city of Ali Mendjelli starts by taking form, the municipality of Constantine celebrates the 2500ème birthday of its city. A new city planned for 300 000 inhabitants, 1500ha was retained for the creation ex nihilo of a whole city. This city has never been part of a lay out scheme; it has been decided in relation to the arrival of new urban planning tools. So, is it worthy of the destiny of Constantine2? Is the size sufficient to counterbalance the weight of the secular city? What makes its rejection in the spirit of the Constantine's inhabitants?





Figure 4: Plan.1 Urban plan of the new town of Ali Mendjelli

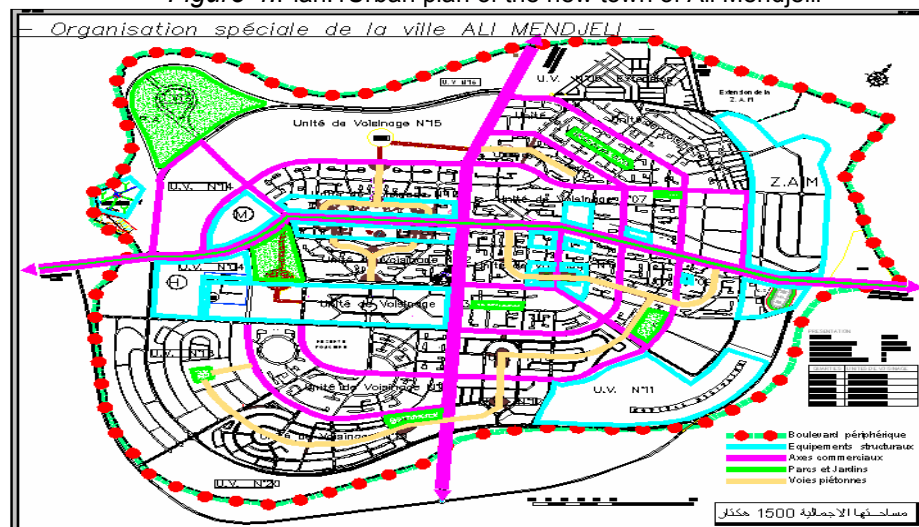


Figure 5: Plan.2 Spatial organization of the new town of Ali Mendjelli

The new town of Ali Mendjelli, constitutes not only a space receiving the demographic overflow of Constantine, but it is the occasion and the un hoped-for chance for the authorities to be able to carry out their project of metropolization and modernization according to their conception of modernity. Lastly, it is a virgin site, without any constraint. Then several criteria are targeted and carried out imposing themselves as being the major signs of the image of the city; among them is the verticality of architecture.

In the official presentations of this new city project, they obliterate the past of Constantine, only the project of city constitutes the basement and the presented action form. A project illustrated by the achievements from five to six years of town planning, aiming to assert the town of Ali Mendjelli as a high place of contemporary architecture.

The higher limit of the town of Ali Mendjelli size depends on a regional or national planning matter. In the master plan, it was established a proposal of a town for 300.000 inhabitants, with possibility of increasing this long-term figure, a surface of 1.500 ha, a capacity of 50.000 residences.

Officially and theoretically *"this structure should allow the development of a whole range of centres with various importance, while the city realization and beyond its first section, this system makes it possible to give birth to these qualities of character and identity which are often apparent in the historical development of the cities..."*.

It is true that since the starting point, the watchword concerning the type of construction or architecture selection and choices has been clearly announced. It was generally expressed in a language which stressed terms such as: the street, the trade on street, the pedestrian passages, the frontages on street, the urban density, the arcades bordering the streets, constructions in height...etc. it was, in fact, the principal instructions on the schedules of conditions addressed to the operators and to promoters.

The new dimension integrated by this city is the towers one, between 14 and 17 levels, set along the central axis constituting the linear centre of the city. These towers that are detached from the basic gauge: the usual building from 5 to 6 levels in Algerian cities, adopted for the remainder of the city. A «vertical city» decision from the «Ministry », the objective was: to give "a style to this city".

A linear centrality materialized along a 80 meters broad monumental axis over a length of 1500metres, a broad ground full supposed to be pedestrian in the centre, alleys of cars on both sides and spaces of greenery " *the watchword retained in the schedule of conditions was ' the city effect'.* To find the city left in Constantine, understanding by there not the medina (non-renewable) nor the ZHUN (not very liveable), but the colonial ,so finding the street, the trade, the pedestrian ways, animation, the urban density "(COTE M, 2006).

It is a strange monumentality on a 'No man's land'. Architecture being one of the forms of our comprehension of reality, it is the method through which a cultural interaction between inhabitants is built. The architecture of this new city is unrecognizable; the masses are unusual and detached from urban space. There is no rhythm of walk. All this makes communication with space and its perception so

difficult within such a framework which takes in account only quantity in height and width. In addition, there is the forced settlement in the city; 56% of city programmes of habitat consist of social one, 20% the socio participative habitat, 18% for the formula hiring-sell, only 1% for real promotion and 6% of private individual houses program.

Because of its mode, the settlement in Ali Mendjelli city constitutes the major fact in the representation of this city by the inhabitants of Constantine.

Three categories of populations were concerned with re-housing towards the new city: the Medina disaster victims, the landslides disaster victims and the shantytowns occupants. In 2005, based on six people on average per family, approximately 72000 people were transferred to the town of Ali Mendjelli and Massinissa at Khroub city. The settlement was supposed to be done in a voluntary and progressive way according to the populations' choices. However, the force of an administered transfer of quite precise populations has done it.

The drawbacks of this kind of settlement were of major importance: to give to the new city of Ali Mendjelli an indication of re-housing, city of the poor. An image without a nuance of urbanity *"a too homogeneous and too poor settlement for a real urban life ...re housing dealing obliterated the populations diversity, essential to any life and any city"* (COTE M, 2006)

Moreover, the re-housed people continue to exist only by their categories: old city disaster victims, slips disaster victims, the shantytowns community, social cases. They are still identified by their original places. Various labels with pejorative connotations stuck to the inhabitants who only renew these districts of origin by giving same names to the new occupied places, transporting in the same time, social space practices. (PELLEGRINO P, 1994)

4-FROM CONSTANTINE CITY TO THE NEW CITY OF ALI MENDJELLI, A MATER OF IDENTITY

The main stake for any city is to constitute itself in a place of memory and to assert itself as place of power, through some urban signs and images.

In fact, by its built forms and its organized space, the city is a place. CH N Schulz asserts that each place does have a particular interpretation, a characteristic image, individuality. By syllogism, we deduce that each city has its own character, so individuality. Many cities testify this fact. However, even so obvious is this reality, it remains difficult to understand how a city preserves its identity and its character, and especially the role which it can play in the reinforcement of its inhabitants identities,

in other words, in keeping the feeling of belonging and being anchored to this place, perennial. It is also hard to figure out how, in the contrary case, we end up to territories without places, face to the loss of the selection criteria for the appropriation of space and the belonging to it (SASSI S, 1996).

Any city emerges in the Co-constitution of space and the society; a common space where the individual and collective identities confront themselves and complement one another. The researchers recognized the primacy of the mental images in the transmission of the models related to the culture, and their role in the safeguarding of the collective memory by the cultural tradition. This is, according to P. V. MEISS, the base itself of the idea of the place. The tradition being born obligatorily from acts and conventional behaviors related to conceptual diagrams, space situations as well as forms and memorable textures (MEISS P V, 1986).

In fact, the reaction that we have in front of any built landscape, either architectural (SIVADON P, 1969) or urban one brings back our cultural bottom. Any brutal transformation is felt like an aggression with the culturally interiorized code governing the comprehension and the perception of space. This is why, in any city, architecture must be "the good measurement" of the identity. Because at the time it tries to transform the traditionally transmitted connection that the inhabitants maintain with the understood and accepted visibility of space they belong to, by the forms and the scale, architecture is regarded as a rupture of the traditional order of the aesthetic and perceptive inhabitants vocabulary (MARTINON JP, 1991) .

Everybody makes a mental image of his city. These representations of the city space also vary from a group of actors to another. They even can be sometimes unmatched; which is a major reason for each new produced space rejection, because it breaks the balance of the representations. For that, the stakes of space and representations merge. Muriel Rosenberg expresses it in other words: *"the way in which a society thinks its space is thus a factor of construction of space"* (ROSEMBERG M, 2000).

Admittedly, we share PIERRE SANSOT opinion concerning the fact that each city, whatever its size has the right to assert its difference and that it is not necessary to compare the incomparable (SANSOT P.1994). However, we share still more the same author's idea concerning permanence of some signs that trace a markdown line between an urban entity and another. Nevertheless, we extend this idea to the character that the same author speaks about, preferring the use of the term 'charm' to that of 'quality of life'. This charm related to the super saturation of sense in a place

where each part has a history, is carrying life stories...etc. such is the problem of the great variation made by the spirits of Constantine's inhabitants on the representations of the two cities.

5-The urban project

Constantine "a regional capital, a metropolis" constitutes the ambitious urban project of this town public authority. It is prestigious project, but at the same time a double-edged weapon. With the emergence of this project, a new conception of the city and its image is induced, making re-appear on the surface the new urban modernity models, with all the speech which supports it and the indicators which materialize it; And there is people reaction. A new attitude towards the current city of Constantine as towards the new town of Ali Mendjelli emerges.

Two urban centers have to be managed according to this perspective of metropolization; however, each one belongs to a different urban register, obeys logic different from the other' one:

- A new urban centre, the new town of Ali Mendjelli, located at approximately 17 km far from the town of Constantine;
- An old urban centre named the town of Constantine.

The city is set on scene with all the enquiries surrounding it, and this reveals the social imaginary of all those who take part in this speech about the city.

Each social actor in the city does have a representation of it. This representation, which according to Muriel Rosemberg constitutes a filter of the knowledge about the reality and influences, in this case, the action, is conveyed by the speech produced on the space of this city (ROSEMBERG M, 2000).

We have tried to distinguish the various representations related to the various actors in connection with the town of Constantine, through the produced speech, trying to get the significances of their actions. More especially, such as the same author confirms it, any action on space is motivated by the symbolic values one attributes to space, in a way that the symbolic values system which sticks to space is in itself a component of the space representations. Therefore, the stakes on space are also stakes of representation (ROSEMBERG M, 2000).

The official speech reveals the intention to equip the town of certain attributes of urbanity and modernity, which, at the same time, contribute to its economic performance. The urban development of Constantine project requires an improvement of the city image. This calls actions that relate primarily to the assertion of the city by specific projects, spectacular, however nevertheless with an

ecological action according to the topical environmental policy (ROSEMBERG M, 2000).

The immediate objective is in particular to improve the urban image of the structuring axes and thoroughfares of the city center, the thing that goes hand in hand with the necessary improvement of the traffic inside it. Projects are tunnels and car subways, the exchangers, the tram, the trans-Rhumel viaduct, the highway, the cable car, the bridge...it is a kind of city mobilization, which passes by the resort to urban signs.

However, introducing a system of action mobilizing the various actors around this project seems to be difficult, as expressed by the local authorities, whereas the innovation that the urban project brings should find favorable receiving environment, persons to take charge of things at all the intervention levels and a collective engagement.

On the civil society side, there is a mobilization of the social actors organized in associations fighting for the old city. In speeches, it is a matter of "*...war of the patrimony in Algeria, which is lost or gained here in Constantine*". Local inhabitants and associations consider the authorities technical works and interventions as a threat for their city in terms of not respecting the patrimony and introducing many changes into its fabric.

Voluntary partnerships founded on an attachment for this city are concretized by an engagement, a will of action, conception of what is their city and the convictions about their vision on this city future.

Inhabitants, in and outside the city, natives of this city, try to mobilize themselves around releasing events such as projects in favor of the patrimony safeguarding suggested and carried by the community of the university researchers.

5-Conclusion

It seems obvious that while working on the metropolization project, there was no concerted effort to find out the right way to produce a new space and to rehabilitate an old one, being within the same urban project. Moreover, no regards to the historical background in terms of released images and social representations. The local authorities were not thinking of combining local vision and global one, in terms of local and universal morphologies, and the relevant choices. The consequence of this inadequate strategy is the fact that the two cities, Constantine city and the new town of Ali Mendjelli are put in opposition; a little paradoxical image. In addition, the not expected result is the rejection of the new town in spite of the entire huge budget allocated to it.

The problem of this new city adoption lies in its total perception as non-identifiable urban entity, thus non-appropriable. What is problematic, in fact, is the loss of the reference marks. In the new town of Ali Mendjelli, the architecture is the one of gigantism which is aimed and carried out; great masses of construction to which correspond large uniform frontages, generating a trouble. In his sets of dwelling, the inhabitant face to the repetitively thus, the uniformity, cannot have the impression that his house is identifiable, even less in pushing back districts devalued by their mode of settlement.

The Constantine's inhabitant identified himself rather to his city, which characterize the identifiable and locatable forms. Among those, there are the old city architecture, or traditional architecture rich in architectural details, locatable and familiar characteristic architectonic elements; base, noble stage, crowning, superposition of orders, pediment columns pilasters... details on the man scale which make mentally possible the varied cuttings comprising of the characteristic elements being used as land marks.

This typical natural and urban environment worked, since more than one century, the aesthetic conscience of the majority of its inhabitants, so much so that in their opinion it is the CITY, where they lived and which they know since always.

A frequent mobility from one city to another constitutes an actual parameter which makes it possible to socially institute an individual capacity of selection and comparison, even evaluation, and social criticism. As the all of the inhabitants of the new city come from Constantine, and regularly move to it, this constitutes a worsening factor.

In fact, the colonial settling in Constantine was harmful in some extend for the secular city; because of the violence of interventions on the old fabric...but the French authorities during the colonial period of Algeria did have a visionary leader. This space conceiver allowed the city of Constantine to remain all this long time a high place. The reason is that, even if there were very precise aesthetic recommendations, the architectural production constituted, mainly, an answer to a cultural policy founded upon the resort to tradition and regional repertoire of details and forms (OULEBSIR N, 2000). The architectural landscape definition required some mental dealing such as observation, selection and description. There was a will to build a common space of representation throughout this architectural landscape definition. (OULEBSIR N, 2000)

In the urban landscape of a city architecture must preserve the traditional order of the aesthetic and perceptive vocabulary of the inhabitants. This is the most important element in building representations, especially in case of a rapid

urbanization beside an age old one. There is no way to consider one city representation by fragmenting the urban experience but by considering its full complexity

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up at the conclusion that the external walls and facades of houses express clearly and significantly the styles and way of living origins. The facades are a cultural memory tool, which inscribe themselves in the city as distinctive elements: « ...repérer l'articulation des types et des modèles d'expressivité relatifs à l'habitat. Archétypiques, représentatives d'une continuité culturelle les faces externes de l'habitat sont l'objet de préférences qui rapportent de manière significative l'origine des styles et des façons d'habiter, à des types de pratiques habitantes conditionnées par les types spécifiques de logements qui en sont l'instrument. Les faces externes de l'habitat sont un instrument de mémoire culturelle ; cependant elles s'inscrivent dans la ville non pas comme dans un milieu qui serait unifié par une mémoire habitante, mais comme des éléments distinctifs, emblèmes de rapports de classes dépassant le lieu de leur effectuation, la ville habitée. », In Figures architecturales formes urbaines, p.247.